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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 4, 2002

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DMME Seeking Assistance From Coalfield Community To Help Identify Old, Abandoned Underground Mine Workings

- Old maps could prevent accidental mining into abandoned underground mine workings -

Big Stone Gap, VA - The Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME) is seeking help from the southwest Virginia coal community to expand its geographical electronic database describing the location and extent of old, abandoned underground coal mine workings.

"We have received considerable information from coal and land companies that have opened their files and enabled us to add old mine maps that were created before our agency existed or requirements mandated that copies be submitted to us," said DMME Director Gene Dishner. "However, we believe that another valuable resource exists within the coalfield community where retired miners or their descendents may have early underground mine maps in their possession as keepsakes or memorabilia. We would like very much to borrow these maps so they can be scanned into our database and then returned to the loaner."

The database, which DMME has been building for over a decade, has helped the agency and coal industry identify and prevent accidental mining into abandoned mine workings which can endanger miners. Just such an incident drew international attention this year when nine miners were dramatically rescued after water flooded the Quecreek Mine in Pennsylvania. A map of the abandoned mine works was found in a local museum after the accident occurred and has been used in the state and federal governments' investigation of the accident.

Since commercial coal mining began in southwest Virginia, thousands of mine openings have been created and developed into the over forty mineable coal seams in the region. Some of these mining activities produced limited development underground, especially those that took place on privately owned mineral and were considered to be smaller, family operations. Maps of such underground mine workings are of special interest and would be beneficial for safety planning for mining operations projected to mine remaining or nearby coal reserves.

“Maps of old, abandoned underground mine works are a valuable information resource and with today’s computer technology can be overlaid on standard topographic maps to help pinpoint the location of active mining compared to abandoned mine works,” said Dishner. “And while we may have no way to confirm the accuracy of the old mine maps, having them to work from is better than having no information at all. Especially, when public safety and the safety of our coal miners may be at stake.”

Anyone having old underground coal mine maps they would like to loan to the DMME, may contact the office in Big Stone Gap at (276) 523-8231 or in Keen Mountain at (276) 498-4533, or via e-mail at DmmeInfo@dmme.virginia.gov.

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